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Can You Feel the Burn?

Filed under FAMILIES, HEATH, PUBLIC HEALTH

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By Dawn Whiting, public health educator, [Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center](#)



ness Center. Command fitness leaders led more than 100 Sailors in intense 10-minute workout
nt remained. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Michael K. McNabb)


As the impact of nutrition and physical fitness on overall health becomes more well-known, people are becoming increasingly aware of their caloric balance – how many calories are consumed compared to how many calories are burned. Understanding how calories are burned is a crucial step in achieving your desired caloric balance.


In my experience as a Public Health Educator, one of the most common questions individuals have is how to effectively burn calories. One simple way is increasing the amount of moderate


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activity throughout your day. Understanding the factors that contribute to total energy expenditure (TEE), or the total amount of calories your body uses, is helpful in recognizing ways to increase calories burned. Total energy expenditure has three primary components^{1,2}:

- **Resting Metabolic Rate (RMR)** – number of calories your body uses while at rest. RMR is determined primarily by body weight, composition (muscle vs. fat) and genetics.
- **Thermic effect of food** – number of calories you burn digesting your food.
- **Activity-induced energy expenditure** – number of calories burned doing any type of physical activity. This is the component of total energy expenditure over which you have the most control, so it makes sense to target your interventions at this component.

So what does all of this mean to you? It means burning calories might be easier than you think because any form of physical activity counts including routine, daily activities! There are lots of ways to burn a few extra calories throughout your day. For example:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park in the furthest spot from the entrance when you are running errands.
- Consider walking or biking if you are traveling for less than one mile.
- Do active household chores:
 - Vacuum and clean your house.
 - Lift your groceries out of your car.
 - Get outside – plant a garden, mow the lawn with a push mower, rake the leaves or shovel snow. All are great ways to get your heart rate up!

As a personal trainer, one of my key messages is to avoid a sedentary lifestyle, particularly if you have a job that requires you to sit for long periods of time. Research has shown that prolonged sitting can contribute to weight gain which in turn may increase your risk of chronic diseases such as, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. The good news is that regular breaks from prolonged sitting have the potential to reduce body mass index, waist circumference and triglyceride levels, alleviating some of these health risks – so get up!⁴ Some ways to reduce the amount of time spent sitting include:

- March in place during commercial breaks when watching television, or see how many push-ups you can do before your show comes back on.
- Walk to your co-worker’s desk to talk to them instead of sending an email.
- Set an alert on your calendar or phone to remind you to get up, stretch and walk around every two hours.
- Perform chair exercises to burn calories while you are at work or at your home computer. Start a friendly challenge in your workspace to see who does the most repetitions in a shift!

Resources to help get you moving

Engaging in moderate to intense activity helps you look good, feel good and perform at your

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best. Achieving the recommended 150 minutes of moderate activity per week may seem overwhelming, until you consider all of the different ways you can get moving. To learn about more ways to be active, including the [Navy Operational Fitness and Fueling System](#) (NOFFS) designed to “eliminate the guesswork” from exercise programming, visit the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Active Living website at <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/active-living/Pages/active-living.aspx>.

Dawn Whiting is a Public Health Educator and a National Academy of Sports Medicine Certified Personal Trainer. A former Navy nurse, Dawn also holds a Masters Degree in Exercise Science and Health Promotion.

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